DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 446 139 TM 031 901

AUTHOR Ediger, Marlow
TITLE State Testing Standards versus Creativity.
PUB DATE 2000-00-00
NOTE 8p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Achievement Tests; *Creativity; Elementary Secondary Education; *State Standards; *Testing Programs

ABSTRACT

The balance between conformity to state standards and creativity in providing for individual differences in the classroom is discussed. With the current emphases on accountability and standards, learning opportunities for students are supposed to be aligned with state-mandated objectives. This may lead to a situation in which rote learning, memorization, and teaching to the test make up the curriculum. Some principals feel that the measurement movement is objective, that it provides a meaningful indicator of learner progress in school, and yields data for parents and guidelines about what should be taught. In contrast, some principals, who are more subjective, believe that teaching is an art that involves creativity. Taking a constructivist point of view, these principals emphasize that student work can be analyzed with remediation efforts following in teaching. The use of portfolios fits well with the philosophies of principals who emphasize constructivism. Regardless of the approach taken by the principal, it is vital to be involved in curriculum development and accessible to help teachers in the classroom. (SLD)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 446 139

State Testing Standards Versus Creativity

Marlow Ediger

TM031901

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Marlow Ediger

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

- This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
- Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

STATE TESTING STANDARDS VERSUS CREATIVITY

There is much written in professional educational journals about principals who carefully tow the line in implementing state mandates in the curriculum as compared to those who stress creative methods of instruction to achieve state wide goals of instruction. How much conformity to state mandated curricular objectives should there be in teaching/learning, as compared to novel, unique objectives in teaching and learning? The purpose of this paper is to examine both points of view and offer solutions to the dilemma. Conformity to what is mandated can be quite different as compared to a principal who is continually seeking unique ways to provide for individual differences in the classroom in order to improve the curriculum.

Statewide Mandates and the School Principal

Higher standards and expectations in having students achieve objectives is common to many states in the US. The prevailing beliefs are that students are achieving very minimally in the public schools. With statewide objectives stressed for students to achieve in the classroom, achievement will be upped. Teachers also need to expect more of learners. The pay off will come in terms of higher test scores within a state. Generally, the tests are written under the supervision of the state department of education. Student achievement may then be quickly scored with the tests having multiple choice test items. Machine scoring can make for large numbers of tests being scored rapidly.

Learning opportunities for students are to be aligned with the state mandated objectives. The teacher then selects the learning opportunities. Teaching quality is measured by student test results and scores. Generally, the scores are provided in terms of percentiles, although standard deviations, stanines, quartile deviations, and grade equivalents may also be used to indicate student achievement. Principals may be such strong advocates of students doing well on tests that little room is left for creative and critical thinking as well as problem solving experiences. Rather, rote learning, memorization of subject matter, and "what is on the test" may make up the total curriculum. These principals believe that

1. teachers need to stick to the basics in teaching so that students may do well on mandated tests.
2. teachers may need too stress rote learning if this is what it takes for high test results to come about from students.
3. teachers should refrain from covering student questions, which may not assist the latter in achieving higher test scores.
4. teachers should be assisted by the principal only, on what might be on the state mandated test.

5. teachers should not try out new ides in teaching unless they help up student test scores.

6. teachers should not emphasize any subject matter not aligned with the state mandated test.

7. teachers need to be motivated to stick to items that may be related to what is on the sate mandated test.

8. teachers must realize that high test scores indicate high student achievement.

9. teachers need to face up to the reality that high test scores are equated with good teaching by the lay public.

10. teachers need to be remunerated for their services based on test results of students. Teacher accountability for high student test scores is to be equated with the proficient teacher (Ediger, 1999, 233-240)..

These principals believe that the testing and measurement movement is objective in measuring educational quality. Subjective means to ascertain student achievement is to be frowned upon. Multiple choice test items can cover a broad range of subject matter and are easy to score statewide with computers. Classroom teaching needs to be aligned with state mandated objectives. Tests need to be valid and reliable and also be aligned with the stated objectives. Success for students with high test scores equals successful teaching.

Validity is an important concept to stress in teaching since the learning opportunities need to align with the state mandated objectives. Principals who believe strongly in the measurement movement will be strong advocates here of alignment so that students achieve well on state mandated tests.They may also emphasize the importance of the concept of reliability in that any test should measure consistently. In pilot studies then of state mandated tests, students taking the test should test consistently be it test/retest, alternative forms, and/or alternative forms of reliability.

These principals feel that the measurement movement is objective, provides a meaningful indicator of learner progress in school, provides data to parents that is understandable such as a percentile, and provides excellent guidelines as to what should be taught by teachers when using the state mandated objectives of instruction (Ediger, 2000, Chapter Two).

Contextual Advocates

Principals who are more subjective, as compared to the measurement movement advocates, believe that teaching is an art and involves creativity. The state mandated objectives may be there for students to achieve, but there is room and time for other kinds of

objectives to be emphasized in teaching and learning. Then to, there are creative methods of instruction to use to assist teachers and students to achieve mandated objectives. Principals then who are constructionists believe that

1. students construct their very own knowledge and skills.
2. knowledge/skills are subjective to the learner involved in ongoing lessons and units of study.
3. testing and measuring provide very little data on how well students are doing. The every day accomplishments are completely omitted when reporting test scores.
4. learning by students is in context and not revealed through isolated multiple choice items in tests.
5. teaching and learning occur in a classroom where a teacher knows each student.
6. test writers on the state level do not know students locally and cannot know what the needs of students are when testing is done as a mandate.
7. students are individuals and not a mass number to be given the same test and evaluated en mass with the same standards. Machine scoring and printouts of test data minimize people as individuals.
8. constructivism emphasizes that student work can be diagnosed and remediation efforts follow in teaching. With test scores, no information is provided on what needs to be emphasized specifically in a give learning opportunity.
9. novel, unique methods of teaching need to be stressed to motivate individual student learning.
10. holism is involved in learning, not isolated parts as is true in the testing and measurement movement (Ediger, 2000, Chapter Eighteen).

The testing/measurement movement versus constructivism are quite far removed from reach other. They represent opposite ends of the continuum. What implications are there in this dilemma for university graduate program in school administration? There are numerous implications here for the evaluation of teachers in the school setting. With merit pay, in one form or another being advocated, how do principals know what to look for when assessing the quality of instruction? The following statements then become highly salient:

1. teachers posses different philosophies of teaching. Principals need to be highly cognizant of this. Diverse philosophies of education need to be presented in preparing school administrators with the goal being that understanding and meaning of each be present.
2. memorization of subject matter that might be on a test embraces beliefs in the basics as being highly significant in the curriculum. Constructivism emphasizes that students are different from

each other and the basics may largely depend upon what the learner with teacher guidance feels is important to learn.

3. the measurement movement emphasizes that a single percentile adequately describes what a student has learned. To the constructivist, this single score/percentile is inadequate to reveal what students individually have learned. Those differences in thinking stress diverse points of view on how to assess student progress.

4. fear is built up within teachers and administrators with items such as merit pay, school bankruptcy acts, tuition voucher plans, as well as commercial companies providing education for students. If test results are to provide data, for example, in giving merit pay raises,. does attempting to teach to the state mandated test determine methodology?

5. many parents take seriously student test score results in terms of percentiles. That single numerical result is much easier to understand as compared to looking over the numerous entries in a portfolio and then make judgments of a learner's achievement. The writer has spoken to many parents about their beliefs in the testing and measurement movement. The impression gotten is that parents as a whole do put considerable faith in test results. The beliefs of parents may then stack the cards in favor of the testing an measurement movement. It may take much education of parents to instill faith in portfolios to indicate learner progress.

6. state mandated testing stresses a percentile to indicate at a given time where a student is in achievement. There is a specific point in space and time that indicates the achievement level of any student. With constructivism, student achievement in products and processes is shown on a continuum. Thus, these products/processes may show, in sequential intervals of time, progress made over previous completed work of students.

7. measurement and testing provides a single numeral as indicating learner achievement whereas constructivism stresses using a variety of data in a portfolio to assess students such as snapshots, written work, art products, recordings of oral experiences, video tapes of committee endeavors, self evaluation information, and data in improved listening skills.

8. tests contain multiple choice items which tend to be isolated from each other. Portfolios contain information on related items such as in ongoing lessons and units of study. Students need to perceive relationships among ideas.

9. sequence in test results provide numerical data which does not show relationship among products and processes. In a portfolio, for example, a student may show written work in sequence to indicate ordered achievement.

10. measurement movements have an easy way to show student

progress with a numeral, whereas constructivism has a much more complex approach in revealing student progress, such as in written work. For example a considerable amount of content needs to be read and noticed to indicate achievement and progress of learners. Then too, when two or three qualified people read a set of portfolios, will they agree as to the quality of each with interrater or interscorer reliability? (Ediger, 1995, nr. 115).

Questions Raised in Portfolio Development

There are vital queries to be raised for portfolio development that need to be listed and discussed by those in undergraduate teacher education programs and graduate programs in school administration:

1. how much control should students have over their very own assessment in portfolio development?
2. what kind of balance should there be in revealing knowledge, skills, or attitudes within a portfolio?
3. how can the theory of multiple intelligences be brought in to a portfolio? (See Gardner, 1993, for a listing of eight different intelligences in student learning and assessment).
4. how much emphasis should be placed upon the separate subjects as compared to a more integrated curriculum in portfolio goals?
5. should competition as well as cooperation be stressed in teaching and leaning?
6. how large should a portfolio become to truly reveal what a student has learned?
7. how can portfolio contents reveal problem solving, as well as creative and critical thinking skills of learners?
8. how can portfolio results be shared effectively with parents in the community so that cooperatively they can work with teachers to improve the curriculum for students?
9. how might a portfolio indicate relevant trends being pursued in any curriculum area?
10. which common weaknesses are there in portfolio development and how might these be remedied? (Ediger, 1997, nr. 120).

The school principal of today has many challenges that need careful study and consideration. He/she needs to be involved in curriculum development more so than ever before. Principals need to be actively involved in assisting teachers in the classroom. Being holed up in an office makes for a shunning of responsibilities.

References

Ediger, Marlow (1997), "Portfolios, Pupils, and their Teacher," Education Magazine, nr. 120, 20-26.

---------- (1995), "School Administration as Decision Making," Education Magazine, nr. 115, 19-27.

---------- (2000), Teaching Mathematics Successfully. New Delhi, India: Discovery Publishing House, Chapter Eighteen.

---------- (2000), Teaching Reading Successfully. New Delhi, India: Discovery Publishing House, Chapter Two.

---------- (2000), "Appraising Learner Progress in the Social Studies," College Student Journal, 33 (2), 233-240.

Gardner, Howard (1993), Multiple Intelligences: Theory Into Practice. New York: Basic Books.